A Comparison of Janamsakhi Accounts on the Early Childhood of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji | An Independent Translation and Comparison of Never Before Translated Texts

Introduction

The following is my second post in a series of posts where I will compare the accounts of the life of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji by various historical texts. I will translate and summarize these accounts to the best of my ability. I will compare the accounts given in the Puratan Janamsakhi (Also known as Valaitiwala), Nanak Parksh (By Kavi Santhok Singh, the author of Suraj Granth), Bhai Gurdas Ji's Vaars, Gyan Ratanavli (By Bhai Mani Singh) Miharban Janamsakhi (By the Mina heretics), Twarikh Guru Khalsa (By Giani Gian Singh where he collected information for 15 years from mostly oral sources to form), and the B40 Janamsakhi (Written 1730s).

I will translate extracts and summarize the accounts given in these 7 texts. In my first part I translated and compared the account of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birth. I will now pick up where those texts left off and examine the account of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's early childhood. I will begin with a brief introduction, followed by a translation or summary of the text. Following all of this I will compare all the texts, and then attempt to form a decisive account based on all these sources.

Texts

Puratan Janamsakhi

The Puratan Janamsakhi provides a paragraph and one more sentence to the birth of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. It also offers a stanza long Manglacharan to Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji before the narration of the birth. They have been translated in their entire form.

"In 1526 Bikrami (1469) Baba Nanak was born, within the month Vaisakh, on the third lunar day, in the moonlight, at amrit vela, within one more pehar of the night remaining. In the court of Waheguru hymns of bliss rang. The 330,000,000 Devte bowed, the 64 Jogini, the 52 Birs, the 6 Jati, the 84 Sidhs, the 9 Naths all bowed. Those Bhagats who came to the world to liberate said, '[We] should bow to him'.

Then [in the home of] Kalu Khatri, caste Bedi, a resident of Talwandi Rai Bhoe Bhatti Ki, there he took birth."

Nanak Parkash

The Nanak Parkash provides 2 chapters of great length just on Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birth and naming as well as 2 chapters before that, one of which a Mangalacharan to all the Gurus where Kavi Santhok Singh Ji further provides info on the text and his goal in writing. (Being to narrate the true history of Guru Ji by reastoring the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi as some anti-Sikh sects had released an edited version of Bhai Bala's Janamsakhi) The second chapter provides

context for the text which is the conversation between Bhai Bala Ji and Sri Guru Angad Dev Ji. A full translation of these chapters can be found on gurupurshotam . com. Thus I will only examine its content and provide a brief summary.

Following the first chapter Kavi Santhok Singh begins the narrative with Sri Guru Angad Dev Ji as the Guru, in Khadoor Sahib, wanting to create a text on the life of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji soon after becoming Guru. At the same time coming to him is Bhai Bala Ji, a contemporary of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji wanting to meet his new form. Much detail occurs, but you can read that on your own for I will focus on the story Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Bhai Bala begins telling the life of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji to Sri Guru Angad Dev Ji. Kavi Santhok Singh's main source is what Bhai Bala Ji said which was written by Bhai Paira Mokha and approved by Sri Guru Angad Dev Ji. Kavi Santhok Singh adds much context for the reason of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birth as well as information on Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's family. The account of the birth is similar to other Janamsakhis with Devte worshiping Guru Ji who did not cry at birth. Kavi Ji gives lots of details and even the exact time of birth. (2 Pehar and 1 Ghari into the night, 12:24) Kavi Ji gives Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's first words as "Sat Kartar" (True Creator) which was used by Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji as a greeting in his later life. (Similar to Fateh) Kavi Ji mentions the Pandit informing Metha Kalu of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's divinity which he had already suspected. The full details can be read in the aforementioned website, but Kavi Ji clearly provides the most detail and info about Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birth.

Bhai Gurdas Ji's Vaars

Bhai Gurdas Ji needs no introduction nor does his writings which serve a great importance in Sikhi. Bhai Gurdas Ji's first Vaar is dedicated to Sikh history, most of which focuses on Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Bhai Gurdas Ji does not give a birth story, moreover he focuses on the plight of the world and the major deeds of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Bhai Gurdas does provide details on Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's childhood, of what occurred before his birth, and of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's purpose, but as mentioned no birth story. From this we can conclude that Bhai Gurdas Ji did not write his Vaar as a Janamsakhi, as on the likes of the others discussed, rather he wished to write of the grand purpose of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji and of more of his major deeds.

Gyan Ratanavli

Bhai Mani Singh Ji's text is actually a katha of Bhai Gurdas Ji's vaars. The purpose of Bhai Mani Singh Ji's text was to counter corrupted texts on Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's life. (The Miharban Janamsakhi) Despite this Bhai Mani Singh Ji adds much unique information on Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birth. He includes a page about Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birth along with commentary on the vaars. I will translate the beginning account

"In 1526 Bikrami (1469) in Vaisakh (Some manuscripts say Katak), in the lunar fortnight, on the third lunar day with 1 and a quarter of a pehar of the night remaining on the auspicious month, auspicious day, auspicious star, auspicious time, auspicious date, auspicious mahurat (unit of time), and auspicious ghari (unit of time) in the home of Mata Tripata and Pita Kalu the

Waheguru came showing his clever arm, thus Pita Kalu layed downed bowing flat like a stick and the 330,000,000 Devte came and too bowed and the 84 Sidh, 9 Nath, 6 Jati, 52 Bir all came and bowed and singers, and singernesses bowed and demi-gods, pandits, those who meditated, [and] all the great people that were came and bowed, for to save [people in] Kaljug Waheguru has taken an incarnation."

The rest of the account is similar and ends with Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji doing a miracle which makes his parents think all of what occurred, which they saw, was a dream.

Miharban Janamsakhi

The Miharban Janamsakhi was written by the Mina sect, which opposed the Gurus and attempted to establish their own Gurus. The founder, Prithi Chand, even made attempts on the life of Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji. This fact does add a different viewpoint than other texts do. This Janamsakhi was written before Bhai Gurdas Ji's Vaars (Per Bhai Mani Singh) and was considered tainted and corrupt. Sikhs were advised not to read it, but we can still view it through a historical lens and compare it to the other Janamsakhis.

This Janamsakhi dedicates an entire page to the birth of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birth, but has around 8 and a half pages before the birth account speaking of Raja Janak. The Miharban Janamsakhi claims Raja Janak was the previous life of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. This is a different topic, but it is important to note that this is exclusively found in this text. I will just translate the part on Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birth.

"Then Baba Nanak took birth in the home of Kalu, the womb of Tipra (The text writes the name as such), [as a] Bedi Khatri on the land of Punjab Chala Wale (Other manuscripts give the location as the one given in all other Janamsakhis) In 1526 Bikrami (1469) in the month of Vaisakh on the third day at the pehar of night in amrit vela the incarnation came in Kaljug, the blissful Shabad rang, the 330,000,000 Devte bowed, the Nine Naths bowed, the Six Jatis bowed, the 84 Sidhs bowed, the unknown and known bowed, [and] the saints and abhyaasis bowed. Hundreds of millions of saints bowed. Instruments(?) rang over the birth of the Guru Baba, many men were liberated. Many poor people received wealth. Many people who were infected had their infection go. With the birth of Guru Baba Nanak all life was in bliss. The Devte were in bliss. First much happiness was supported from the birth of Guru Baba Nanak. All the babies cry, "Ooaa. Ooaa", yet all said that Baba Nanak said, "Tero Nau, Tero Nau" (Your name) No one could understand what he said. When a pacifier is given it is taken [by the child], otherwise they suck their thumb. When mother attempted to give it, neither did he cry or accept it. Brahamgian that should have been what was given. The nature of Guru Baba Nanak's birth was not just, "Tero Nau, Tero Nau" (Your name) ? (Next line untranslatable by me) When [he] was born then parts of wealthy clothes, and congratulations, were received to the poor. Kalu donated many 100s of silver coins. Many hungry and thirsty were fed."

Twarikh Guru Khalsa

This text comes from the time of the British Raj, but still serves great importance as Giani Gian Singh collected information from many sources and documented oral history which gives an interesting insight to the life of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

“On 1526 Bikrami and 1469 CE Katak Sudi 15 in Pargana Shakrpur, Rai Bhoe Di Talwandi, which is 20 miles west of Lanore, in the home of Kalu Chand Mehta, from Mata Tripta, on one pehar from the morning on a Sunday Guru Nanak was illuminated (born) under the reign of Balhul Lodhi. Like how heat decreases when it is supposed to rain, like that with his birth came in people’s heart when he positive traits of compassions, righteousness, forgiveness, [and] love. In each home in Talwandi there was happiness. Pro Milk, curd, saffron etc. auspicious items were taken and songs of blissfulness were sung. The wives of the residents of the village and workers came giving congratulations. Mehta Kalu Chand distributed much sugar, food, clothes, [and] money and called his Pandit Hardyal to write down the birth paper. When the Pandit called the maid [and] saw the characteristics of the boy [and] in due time the maid named Daultaa said, ‘Endless amount of children have been born with my hands, but I have never seen a boy like this. At his time of birth such a light shined in the house like when the Sun rises. In the skys a cold wind with a beautiful fragrance came. On this holy day chants of ‘Jai. Jai’ were heard. This child was born like how the moon comes out from the clouds.’ Then a servant named Tulsaa too narrated the characteristics of the child, greatly.

Hearing this the Pandit took in account the auspicious times, the stars, [and] planets doing which he formed the birth chart and birth paper which he told Kalu Chand and it was written on the paper that this child will do great deeds. He will be called Sache Patshah, [and] over his head an umbrella and fan will wave. Devte, people, animals, [and] birds will recognise him as Waheguru. He will be the true boatman for the world, his community will be. Hearing this Kalu Chand gave the Pandit lots [of gifts]”

B40 Janamsakhi

The B40 Janamsakhi comes from the times of the Gurus, but is very interesting as from reading the whole text it seems the author has used many previous Janamsakhis and combined the information.

“In Talwandi Rai Bhoe Bhatti Ki. Baba Nanak Ji was born in the home of Kalu Khatri Caste Bedi. In Kaljug Baba Nanak came. He started his own community. In Kaljug 1526 Bikrami Baba Nanak was born. In Vaisakh, the third day, at Amrit Vela with a pehar of the night remaining. Blissful hymns rangs at Baba Nanak’s court. 330,000,000 Devte bowed. 84 Sidh, 9 Nath, 64 Jogi, 52 Bir, [and] 6 Jari bowed. Those people who came to preach on the world. They all bowed. Then Kalu, Khatri Caste Bedi, lived in Talwandi Rai Bhoe Bhatti Di. There [he] was born.”

Comparison and Analysis

There is a lot to unpack here. I will attempt to talk Janamsakhi-by-Janamsakhi. The Puratan Janamsakhi is completely the same with the B40 account with the wording rearranged. Thus one could assume that the B40 Janamsakhi is based on the Puratan Janamsakhi or Puatan Tradition. This will seem true by reading the first 21 pages and some other sakhis found in the text, but the rest of the B40 Janamsakhi is not like the Puratan Janamsakhi. Thus, the B40 cannot just be a rewriting of the Puratan Janamsakhi, moreover it appears that both used the same source. This source, which will be referred to as “Q”, in fact appears to have been used by all the texts I am examining and even in other texts such as the Adi Sakhian, and, possibly, Mehma Parkash Vartak. This hypothetical Q source would mention the date of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s birth, the time as Amrit Vela, the various Saints that bowed to Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the caste, the creed, and the location of the birth of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. (It mentions much more which we will see as we further explore Guru Ji’s life through different episodes) This Q source can be seen used to an extent in Bhai Mani Singh Ji’s Janamsakhi and in the Miharban Janamsakhi, but it is not used in Bhai Bala Ji’s Janamsakhi and those of that tradition (Nanak Parkash, and partially Twarikh Guru Khalsa) This would logically make sense as Bhai Bala did not use any literary source for his Janamsakhi, but rather said what he knew as an eyewitness or had heard from his elders.

Both the Puratan Janamsakhi and B40 one do not mention Mata Tripta Ji which suggests she was also not named by the Q source. Both of these sources also put Guru Ji’s birth in Vaisakh which is wrong, as Bhai Gurdas, whose work was approved by Guru Ji, mentions Guru Ji being born in Katak. The Q source and the Janamsakhi accounts based off of it do not seem to be interested in talking of particular events in the birth of Guru Ji, but rather focus on stressing Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s greatness by describing those who bowed to him.

Nanak Parkash, and in turn Bhai Bala and other texts of that tradition, does not make any mention of many Devte, Sidhs etc. coming to bow to Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Rather, Nanak Parkash focuses much more on the prophecy of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Nanak Parkash gives exact times and quotes which would make sense considering its source. Nanak Parkash also puts Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s first words as “Sat Kartar”. This contradicts the Miharbani Janamsakhi which gives its own unique word. This creates a problem in determining the true history of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, for only one source can be correct on this matter and to determine such is hard. Which account you believe is mostly based on personal bias, but I find that the claim originating from Bhai Bala Ji is most likely to be accurate due to him being a contemporary. (I am addressing it now, but the claim of Bhai Bala Ji not existing is countered perfectly by Dr. Trilochan Singh)

Gyan Ratanwali of Bhai Mani Singh makes use of the Q source, and of Bhai Bala Ji’s work (More examples of both can be seen in later Sakhis) Bhai Mani Singh Ji’s main account is very similar to the texts of the Q source, but (the part I did not translate which occur after the birth) are very similar to Bhai Bala’s text. There is some information found in Bhai Mani Singh Ji’s Janamsakhi that contradicts others. The time of the birth is given as 1.25 pehars before the night ends which would put it at 2:15. This contradicts Nanak Parkash which puts the time as 12:24. Also note these times are rough and based on the fact night began at 6 pm.

Bansavalinama (An 18th century source) gives a time similar to Nanak Parkash. Due to the fact we have 2 sources against 1 source it seems safe to conclude the majority view is correct.

The Miharban Janamsakhi and Twarikh Guru Khalsa provide information that is both similar to the Bhai Bala Ji tradition as well as unique information. This unique information is most likely oral for we know that was the source of Twarikh Guru Khalsa. Some information of the Miharban Janamsakhi (Such as the opening on Raja Janak) is used to push the view of the author.

A fact I have not discussed yet is if Guru Nanak Dev Ji's parents knew of him being Waheguru at his birth. Nanak Parkash, Bhai Mani Singh, and Twarikh Guru Khalsa suggest yes with Guru Nanak Dev Ji's parents at least being informed of his future. Miharban Janamsakhi does not provide a clear answer to this. The main Janamsakhis based on Q do not make any mention of Guru Ji's parents knowing anything.

Definitive Account (Summarised)

On the full moon of Katak (Bhai Gurdas) of 1469 (All Janamsakhis) at 12:48 (Nanaka Parkash, Bansavalinama) Guru Nanak Dev Ji was born to Mehta Kalu and Mata Tripta in Rai Bhoi Ki Talwandi, a Khatri Bedi family. 330,000,000 Devte, 84 Sidh, 9 Nath, 64 Jogi, 52 Bir, 6 Jari, and many other Bhagats bowed to the new born Guru Nanak Dev Ji. (Q texts ((Mihraban, B40, Puratan, Bhai Mani Singh Ji's) In Talwandi there was lots of happiness. Miracles occurred with the place filled with good smells and everyone was in bliss with their problems gone. (Miharban, Nanak Parkash, Twarikh Guru Khalsa) Guru Nanak Dev Ji's first words was Sat Kartar. (Nanak Parkash) Pandit Hardyal came and gave a prediction that Guru Nanak Dev Ji will do great deeds when he gets older. (Nanak Parkash, Twarikh Guru Khalsa)

This was a brief summary. Next time I will make sure to add more details. Forgive me for any mistakes made.